

IN THE CLAIMS:

Claim 1 (Previously Presented) A process to obtain a fleshed pelt using saline water, said process comprising the steps of:

- i) treating raw hides/skins with not less than 300% w/v of saline water having 11000 to 30000 ppm of chlorides, in the presence of not less than 0.04%w/v of salt of an alkali metal or alkaline earth metal, either individually or in any combination thereof, for a period of not less than 12 hours to obtain soaked hides/skins,
- ii) treating the soaked hides/skins with not less than 2% w/w of alkali metal in combination with not more than 200% w/v of saline water for a period of not less than 6 hours, and
- iii) fleshing the treated hides/skins of step (ii) to obtain the fleshed pelt.

Claim 2 (Previously Presented) A process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the saline water has a sodium chloride concentration of more than 25000 ppm.

Claim 3 (Previously Presented) A process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the salt in step (i) is a salt of an alkali metal.

Claim 4 (Previously Presented) A process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the salt of the alkali metal alkali is selected from the group consisting of sodium hydroxide, sodium carbonate, sodium bicarbonate and combinations thereof.

Claim 5 (Previously Presented) A process, as claimed in claim 9, wherein the salt of the alkaline earth metals is selected from the group consisting of calcium hydroxide, magnesium hydroxide and combinations thereof.

Claim 6 (Previously Presented) A process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the skin/hides are obtained from animals.

Claim 7 (previously presented) A process as claimed in claim 6, wherein the animals selected are from the group consisting of a cow, goat, sheep and buffalo.

Claim 8 (Previously Presented) A process as claimed in claim 1, comprising treating the fleshed pelt ~~is to~~ to prepare a finished leather.

Claim 9 (Previously Presented). A process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the salt in step (i) is a salt of an alkaline earth metal.

Claim 10 (Previously Presented). In a process for obtaining a fleshed pelt comprising the steps of (i) soaking a raw hide/skin in water for a time effective to promote sufficient rehydration of the hide/skin to facilitate the subsequent removal of non-collagenous material from the rehydrated hide/skin, (ii) treating the rehydrated hide/skin with sufficient alkali to swell protein in the rehydrated hide/skin whereby to facilitate removal of the non-collagenous material, and (iii) fleshing the hide/skin treated in step (ii) to obtain the fleshed pelt, the improvement wherein the raw hide/skin is soaked in step (i) in saline water having a salinity of more than 25000 ppm in the presence of a salt of an alkali metal or alkaline earth metal before the hide/skin is treated with the alkali in step (ii), wherein the hide/skin is soaked in step (i) in not less than 300% w/v of the saline water in the presence of not less than 0.04 w/v of the salt of the alkali metal or alkaline earth metal.

Claim 11 (Currently Amended). A process as claimed in claim ~~9~~ 10, wherein the rehydrated hide/skin is treated in step (ii) with not less than 2% w/w of the alkali in combination with not more than 200%w/v of the saline water for a period of not less than 6 hours.

Claim 12 (Previously Presented). A process as claimed in claim 11, wherein the salt is a salt of an alkali metal selected from the group consisting of sodium hydroxide, sodium carbonate, sodium bicarbonate and combinations thereof.

Claim 13 (Previously Presented). A process as claimed in claim 11, wherein the salt is a salt of an

alkaline earth metal selected from the group consisting of calcium hydroxide, magnesium hydroxide and combinations thereof.

Claim 14 (Previously Presented. A process as claimed in claim 11, further comprising treating the fleshed pelt with operations including tanning to prepare a finished leather.

Claim 15 (Previously Presented). A process as claimed in claim 11, wherein the skin/hide is from a cow, goat, sheep or buffalo.